



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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1 October 2009

### RUS103139.E

Russia: Situation and treatment of visible ethnic minorities; availability of state protection  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Russia is a multi-ethnic society (CES Nov. 2008, 35; MRG Oct. 2008) with an estimated population of 141.9 million people (US 25 Feb. 2009, Intr.; CES Nov. 2008, 35). According to the 2002 census, ethnic Russians comprise 79.8 percent of the population (US 3 Sept. 2009; CES Nov. 2008, 35). Ethnic minorities include Tatars (3.8 percent), Ukrainians (2 percent), Bashkirs (1.1 percent), Chuvash (1.1 percent), Chechens (0.9 percent), Armenians (0.8 percent), Mordovans (0.6 percent), Avars (0.6 percent), and other ethnic groups (9.2 percent) (MRG Oct. 2008; see also US 3 Sept. 2009). Russia reportedly has the second largest migrant population in the world (HRW Feb. 2009, 2; *The Sunday Independent* 10 May 2009). Some media sources estimate that there are more than 10 million immigrants in Russia (RFE/RL 11 Dec. 2008; *The Sunday Independent* 10 May 2009). According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), four to nine million people are migrant workers in Russia (Feb. 2009, 2). Sources estimate that 80 percent of migrant workers come from former republics of the Soviet Union (HRW Feb. 2009, 2; CES Nov. 2008, 35).

### Violence against ethnic minorities

Human rights organizations, media sources and the United Nations (UN) Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), report increased racial discrimination, xenophobia, and racially motivated violence against ethnic minorities in Russia (UN 20 Aug. 2008, Para. 18, 29; MRG Oct. 2008; SOVA 15 Apr. 2009; CES Nov. 2008, 27; MBHR 2008; *Russia Profile* 28 July 2008; *The Guardian* 8 Feb. 2009; Interfax 23 Sept. 2008). Potential targets of violence include people from the Caucasus (UN 20 Aug. 2008, Para. 18; MRG Oct. 2008; HRF 2008b), Central Asia (UN 20 Aug. 2008, Para. 18; MRG Oct. 2008; HRF 2008b), and Siberia (HRF 2008b; MRG Oct. 2008), immigrants from Africa (UN 20 Aug. 2008, Para. 18; HRF 2008b) and Asia (HRF 2008b), Roma (UN 20 Aug. 2008, Para. 18; HRF 2008b), Meshketian Turks (UN 20 Aug. 2008, Para. 18) and other ethnic minorities (ibid.). According to the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, a Moscow-based non-profit organization which monitors hate crimes (SOVA n.d.), anyone with "non-Slavic features" may be assaulted by racists in Russia (SOVA 15 Apr. 2009).

SOVA reports a minimum of 525 victims of racist and xenophobic violence in 2008, including 97 deaths (SOVA 15 Apr. 2009). Racist attacks occurred in 44 regions of Russia with the largest concentration in Moscow (57 dead and 196 injured) and St. Petersburg (15 dead and 38 injured) (ibid.). Voronezh (2 dead and 18 injured) and Penza (14 injured) were noted as regions with increased racially motivated violence in 2008 (ibid.). According to SOVA's data for 2008, the main victims of nationalist violence were people from Central Asia (49 dead, 108 injured) and the Caucasus (23 dead, 72 injured) (ibid.). The Moscow Bureau of Human Rights (MBHR), another non-profit organization which monitors hate crimes, reports 113 deaths and 334 injuries resulting from xenophobic attacks in Russia from January to October 2008 (MBHR 2008). According to MBHR, racially motivated crimes increased both in number and severity from 2004 to 2008 (ibid.).

In an Interfax article dated 10 August 2009, the Deputy Director of SOVA stated that there were 39 people killed and 191 injured in xenophobic attacks since the beginning of 2009; attacks occurred in 32 regions of Russia, with the largest concentrations in Moscow, Saint Petersburg and Nizhny Novgorod. SOVA also reports that ultra-right groups have increasingly used explosives in attacks (29 May 2009).

The Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy, which serves an inter-denominational Christian congregation, reports that nearly 60 percent of Africans living in Moscow have been physically assaulted in racially motivated attacks; their findings were based on a survey of 200 people (BBC 31 Aug. 2009).

In one example of a racially motivated attack, which took place in December 2008, a 20-year old Tajik man was attacked by a group of ten men, stabbed six times and decapitated; his body was found in a village

south of Moscow while his head was found in a dumpster in western Moscow (*The Moscow Times* 12 Dec. 2008; *The Guardian* 8 Feb. 2009). Media sources report that a previously unknown ultranationalist group e-mailed a photo of the man's head on a chopping block to two human rights groups with a threat to fight against "'occupiers'" as well as officials who oppose their mission (*The Moscow Times* 12 Dec. 2008; *The Sunday Business Post* 15 Feb. 2009). Sources report on a similar incident in 2007, in which a videotape was posted on a neo-Nazi group's website showing the execution of two dark-skinned men, one by beheading and the other by gunshot (HRF 2008b; *The Sunday Business Post* 15 Feb. 2009). Investigators initially dismissed the video as inauthentic, although it was later confirmed to be genuine (HRF 2008b; *The Sunday Business Post* 15 Feb. 2009; *The Guardian* 8 Feb. 2009). Other victims of racially motivated murders from 2007 and 2008, as reported by Human Rights First (HRF), a New York-based human rights organization, include a student from Ghana who was stabbed 30 times by three unknown assailants in the centre of St. Petersburg, the 19-year-old son of an Iranian diplomat who was stabbed to death in Moscow, and a well-known chess player from the Sakha Republic, who was beaten and stabbed repeatedly by a group of skinheads in Moscow (HRF 2008b).

Media sources report that a group of skinheads, led by Artur Ryno and Pavel Skachevsky, committed 20 murders and 12 attempted murders of people with non-Slavic features between 2006 and 2007 in Moscow (RFE/RL 15 Dec. 2008; *The Guardian* 8 Feb. 2009; AP 15 Dec. 2008). According to *The Guardian*, on the day that Ryno and Skachevsky were apprehended, they had stabbed and killed a Tajik man three hours prior to attacking and stabbing to death a 46-year-old ethnic Armenian outside his apartment building (ibid.).

### **Nationalist movements**

The Center for Eastern Studies (CES), a Polish organization that provides analytical studies of eastern Europe (CES n.d.), indicates increased activity of radical and nationalist movements in Russia (CES Nov. 2008, 32). According to CES, the neo-Nazi skinhead movement is one of the largest informal grassroots movements in Russia (ibid., 32). The Ministry of Internal Affairs reportedly estimates that the neo-fascist movement has 15,000 to 20,000 followers (US 25 Feb. 2009, Sec. 5), but other sources estimate that the movement has as many as 70,000 followers (*Russia Profile* 28 July 2008; Interfax 28 Apr. 2009; HRF 2008b). CES indicates that the majority of active members are 15 to 17 years old, but that the number of those over 20 years old is increasing (CES Nov. 2008, 33). According to a member of Russia's Public Chamber, the skinheads are armed, well-structured, and operate in all big cities, as well as many district centres and small towns (*Russia Profile* 28 July 2008). SOVA similarly reports that there is a wide network of neo-Nazi groups operating and coordinating their activities in all the major cities of Russia (SOVA 15 Apr. 2009).

The Movement Against Illegal Immigration (Dvizhenie Protiv Nelegalnoy Immigratsii, DPNI) and the Slavic Union (Slavonic Union, Slavyanskiy Soyuz) are known nationalist organizations (CES Nov. 2008, 33, 44, 45; SOVA 29 July 2009). CES reports that nationalist groups organize the "Russia March" annually on 4 November for National Unity Day; whereas in 2004 only isolated events occurred in a few cities, by 2007 events were organized in 25 regions throughout Russia (CES Nov. 2008, 33-34). However, SOVA reports that the scale of nationalist rallies and marches has not increased since 2007 (SOVA 29 May 2009).

### **Discrimination**

Sources report that there is an increased level of racial intolerance in Russian society (CES Nov. 2008, 29-31; *Russia Profile* 28 July 2008; *The Sunday Independent* 10 May 2009; UN 20 Aug. 2008, Para. 29; HRW Feb. 2009, 13; MBHR 2008; Interfax 23 Sept. 2008). According to opinion polls, over 50 percent of the Russian population agrees with the nationalist slogan "'Russia for the Russians'" (Interfax 28 Apr. 2009; *The Sunday Independent* 10 May 2009; CES Nov. 2008, 30; HRF 2008b). Sources indicate that nationalistic and xenophobic rhetoric is often used by politicians (CES Nov. 2008, 39; *Russia Profile* 28 July 2008; HRW Feb. 2009, 14-15; Interfax 23 Sept. 2008) and by the media (UN 20 Aug. 2008, Para. 16; *Russia Profile* 28 July 2008). The MBHR indicates that Russian immigrants face discrimination most acutely in the fields of employment and housing (MBHR n.d.).

Some other challenges faced by Russia's ethnic minorities, as outlined by the international non-governmental organization (NGO) Minority Rights Group International (MRG), include secessionism and deteriorating security in the North Caucasus, identity loss and assimilation of smaller minorities in the Russian North, Siberia, the Far East and the North Caucasus and government attempts to downgrade administrative entitlements for some of the smaller minorities (MRG Oct. 2008).

HRW and CES report that many migrants work in the construction business (HRW Feb. 2009, 2; CES Nov. 2008, 37). In a report based on 146 interviews with migrant construction workers in Russia, HRW indicates that many migrant workers face exploitation, sub-standard living conditions, unsafe work conditions, threats and physical abuse (HRW Feb. 2009, 1-2). Sources report that since many migrant workers are illegal, they may be reluctant to report abuse, threats or attacks to the police (ibid., 3; *The Sunday Independent* 10 May 2009). Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reports that 100 Tajik workers were stuck in Moscow without

employment or money in January 2009; some workers reported that their employers had not paid them in months and others reported that police confiscated their passports and demanded bribes (29 Jan. 2009).

SOVA reports an increase in anti-immigration activities in Russia since the autumn of 2008 reportedly in response to the global economic crisis (SOVA 29 May 2009). The Young Guard, the youth wing of Unified Russia, the ruling party, staged anti-immigrant pickets in Russian cities calling for every other migrant worker to be expelled from Russia (ibid.; Reuters 8 Dec. 2008; RFE/RL 11 Dec. 2008). According to RFE/RL, group members held banners which stated "'We will defend Russians'" and "'Our country, our work'" and offered to patrol construction sites for illegal migrant workers (11 Dec. 2008). Prime Minister Vladimir Putin signed a decree in December 2008 cutting the quota for foreign workers by more than half (RFE/RL 11 Dec. 2008; ibid. 18 Dec. 2008). Human rights groups report that while the quota in 2007 was 6 million work permits for migrant workers, in 2008 it was cut to 1.8 million permits (HRW Feb. 2009, 24; MBHR n.d.).

## **Legislation**

Article 105 of Russia's criminal code provides stricter sentences for murder "committed by reason of national, racial, or religious hatred" (Russia 13 June 1996, Art. 105). In addition, Article 63 defines "commission of a crime by reason of national, racial, or religious hatred or enmity" as an "aggravating" factor for determining punishment (ibid., Art. 63). Article 282 of Russia's Criminal Code prohibits:

"[a]ctions aimed at the incitement of hatred or enmity, as well as abasement of dignity of a person or a group of persons on the basis of sex, race, nationality, language, origin, attitude to religion, as well as affiliation to any social group, if these acts have been committed in public or with the use of mass media." (ibid., Art. 282)

Article 282(1) prohibits the creation of extremist groups, organized to prepare or carry out crimes motivated by "ideological, political, racial, national or religious hatred or enmity" and prohibits "participation in an extremist community" (ibid., Art. 282(1)).

## **State Protection**

However, human rights groups report that laws addressing hate crimes are not regularly applied and that the hate motivation of crimes are infrequently prosecuted (HRF 2008a, No. 21; MRG Oct. 2008). Sources report that perpetrators of racially motivated violence are often charged with "hooliganism" rather than crimes with aggravating circumstances (HRF 2008a, No. 21; MRG Oct. 2008; *The Guardian* 8 Feb. 2009; *The Sunday Business Post* 15 Feb. 2009).

Human rights groups have expressed concern with a climate of "impunity" for perpetrators of racial attacks (MRG Oct. 2008; HRF 2008a, No. 4). Russian NGOs report that there is more active prosecution of xenophobic propaganda and racial violence than in previous years, but that the number of racially motivated crimes far exceeds the number of convictions (SOVA 29 May 2009; Coalition of Russian NGOs Sept. 2008). SOVA reports 33 successful prosecutions of racially motivated hate crimes in 2008 whereby 114 people were convicted in 19 regions of Russia; this is up from the 23 racially motivated hate crimes successfully prosecuted in 2007 (SOVA 15 Apr. 2009). However, SOVA also reports that prosecution was less active in the spring of 2009 than in 2008 and reports that a total of 30 offenders were convicted for racist violence, including 6 who received probationary sentences, in the first half of 2009 (SOVA 29 July 2009).

In one example of a hate-crime prosecution, in December 2008, seven defendants, who were part of the Ryno and Skachevsky gang, were sentenced to 6 to 20 years' imprisonment for 20 murders and 12 attempted murders (SOVA 15 Dec. 2008; RFE/RL 15 Dec. 2008; *The Guardian* 8 Feb. 2009). Ryno and Skachevsky were sentenced to ten years' imprisonment each, which was the maximum sentence allowed since they were minors at the time of the crimes (SOVA 15 Dec. 2008; RFE/RL 15 Dec. 2008; AP 15 Dec. 2008).

SOVA reports 49 successful prosecutions of distributing xenophobic propaganda in 2008 whereby 66 people were convicted in 30 regions of Russia (15 Apr. 2009). However, SOVA states that minor cases are prosecuted, such as individuals making one-time statements on internet portals, while many ultra-right publications and Internet portals continue to operate unimpeded (15 Oct. 2008). CERD reports that the laws on combating extremist activities are not being systematically applied to ultranationalist and neo-Nazi groups (UN 20 Aug. 2008, Para. 17). CES reports that anti-extremist legislation has been used to intimidate opposition groups, such as its application against the leader of the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society who was given a suspended sentence for "inciting ethnic hatred" (Nov. 2008, 39). A report submitted to the UN Human Rights Council by a coalition of fifteen Russian NGOs states that political, public and religious groups are increasingly being charged with "extremism" for criticizing authorities (Coalition of Russian NGOs Sept. 2008). SOVA reports cases where newspapers were given warnings for "extremism" for reporting about xenophobia and discrimination, while the groups they investigated did not face charges (15 Oct. 2008).

CERD and the United States (US) Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008* indicate that Russian police subject ethnic minorities to disproportionately frequent identity checks, arrests, detentions and harassment (UN 20 Aug. 2008, Para. 12, 13; US 25 Feb. 2009, Sec. 5). HRW reports that police have extorted, physically abused, or demanded unpaid labour of migrant workers and that riot police have extracted bribes or assaulted migrant workers in the course of document inspections (Feb. 2009, 69, 73). CERD and Freedom House report that authorities are reluctant to allow residence registration to migrants from the Caucasus, Central Asia and to other ethnic minorities (UN 20 Aug. 2008, Para. 22; Freedom House 2009).

According to the Justice Minister, as cited by Reuters, the police have set up a special unit to track the activities of extremist and terrorist groups (Reuters 4 Feb. 2009). SOVA reports that the Ministry of Interior has created a new Department for Counteraction to Extremism under the Office for Organized Crime Control, but suggests that it has yet to make a positive impact (SOVA 29 May 2009).

### **Non-governmental organizations**

There are multiple human rights organizations active in Russia, including SOVA and the MBHR (SOVA n.d.; MBHR n.d.). The Coalition Against Hate, an advocacy coalition of over 25 human rights groups in the former Soviet Union, monitors hate crimes, religious discrimination, and intimidation of activists (Coalition Against Hate n.d.a; *ibid.* n.d.b). However, sources report an increasing number of threats and assaults against human rights activists by nationalists (Coalition of Russian NGOs Sept. 2008; *Toronto Star* 27 June 2009; HRF 2008b). Media sources report that a prominent human rights attorney and a journalist who reported on right-wing groups were gunned down during the day in Moscow in January 2009 (*Sunday Business Post* 15 Feb. 2009; *Toronto Star* 27 June 2009). Media sources report that the Director of SOVA received death threats from skinheads by e-mail, phone and at his home, but the police have not identified any suspects nor removed his personal information from the Internet (VOA 4 Aug. 2009; *Toronto Star* 27 June 2009). According to Amnesty International (AI), investigations into attacks against activists, journalists and lawyers are "ineffective" and create a climate of "impunity" (8 May 2009).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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